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WILDLIFE SERVICES—ARIZONA

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Arizona

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Arizona Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

Arizona is a diverse mix of urban and suburban settings, agricultural lands, forest, desert, and tribal lands. This ecological and geographic diversity allows for a remarkable range of wildlife species. More and more, however, interactions between wildlife and the public are increasing as people encroach on both agricultural lands and wildlife habitat. In the last decade, Arizona's human population has grown by 40 percent to more than 5 million residents.

WS employees assist Arizonans in many ways: helping livestock and dairy producers reduce losses from predators and birds; addressing serious disease threats to humans, pets, and wildlife; protecting the lives of pilots and air passengers from dangerous wildlife collisions with aircraft; and assisting in protecting many State and Federally threatened and endangered species.



Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Natural Resources—Beavers are present almost anywhere there is a continuous source of water in North America. In Arizona's desert climate, where water and trees are scarce, an influx of beaver can wreak great havoc with the environment. Beaver often build dams to modify the environment and enhance their habitat, which is beneficial for some associated species. However, high beaver populations concentrated in select areas can also reduce native flora, jeopardizing the survival of certain wildlife species. Over a 40-year period, beaver damage to agricultural resources and infrastructure developments have exceeded \$40 billion in the southeastern United States. Most of the damage is a result of flooding and the subsequent loss of timber, crops, roadways, railroads, and property. Substantial damage also occurs through bank burrowing and tree cutting or girdling. In addition, beavers can carry *Giardia*, rendering them a potential threat to public health by contaminating water supplies.

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting livestock from coyote, bear, mountain lion, Mexican wolf, and blackbird damage
- Protecting parks and lakes from diseases and damage caused by waterfowl and coots
- Managing beaver damage through nonlethal methods
- Protecting public safety, aircraft, and military operations from wildlife hazards
- Reducing human exposure to rabies and plague

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Arizona:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Reducing blackbird damage to sunflowers and feedlots
- Evaluating waterfowl as disease, parasite, and noxious weed reservoirs
- Controlling wildlife vectors of rabies and bovine tuberculosis
- Improving rodent damage management methods

WS is recognized internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing beaver damage to the timber industry. WS' research arm, the National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC), is leading the way in developing nonlethal techniques for beaver management. This research and additional research on beaver and wetland ecology will supplement the knowledge that is currently available on beavers and their habitat.

Protecting Air Travel—Every year lives are endangered worldwide and billions of dollars are wasted when birds and other wildlife damage aircraft. Experts estimate that wildlife strikes with airplanes cost the U.S. civil aviation industry more than \$470 million annually. Arizona has the fifth busiest airport in the United States, having processed nearly 36 million passengers last year. WS biologists provide both technical assistance and direct assistance at airports across the State to protect aircraft and public safety.

To support this effort, NWRC has published more than 100 technical publications on the subject. The center continually conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports, develop management tools to reduce these hazards, and provide airport personnel with information to control or prevent these hazards.

Protecting Livestock from Wildlife—In addition to the many factors that can cause economic losses to livestock producers (disease, severe weather, etc.), predation is a serious concern. Coyotes, bears, mountain lions, and blackbirds cause significant losses to some producers by attacking sheep and cattle, spreading diseases, and consuming and contaminating feed. Unfortunately, these losses are felt most acutely by small farmers and ranchers. In Arizona and other western States, it is estimated that 75 percent of WS' cooperative agreements to manage damage are with small farmers and ranchers.

NWRC has worked to improve the selectivity of traps and snares that are used to catch predators. Tension devices on traps and breakaway snares help ensure that only depredating animals are caught. Researchers are also testing a radio-activated electronic guard frightening device that activates when predators approach. This innovation will help prevent depredation from occurring. As these and other methods are developed, they will be provided to field personnel and producers for their use.



Looking to the Future

For Arizona wildlife managers, public health and safety has become a growing concern. Rising residential populations coupled with increased recreational use of public lands has created a greater need for land managers to deal with disease threats posed by wildlife. In 2000, a first of its kind outbreak of bat rabies in Arizona's skunk population occurred in the Flagstaff area. As a whole, rabies is on the increase throughout Arizona. The program has also had a marked increase in requests for assistance with emergency planning for foot-and-mouth disease, West Nile virus, and other diseases. Current resources, however, limit progress in addressing the increased demand for this very specialized area of work.

Another issue tapping WS' resources is the growing Mexican wolf population. Reestablished after becoming extinct in Arizona, Mexican wolves continue to spread outside of the reintroduction area. Natural reproduction is also occurring within the reintroduced packs. The increased demand for WS' assistance in addressing depredation complaints, makes it difficult to respond to the number of requests.

Arizona Wildlife Services Funding ●●●●●●●●●●

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

